

No rhyme, reason to 'Cat in the Hat'

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK (CNS) — A brother and sister learn that nothing cures boredom quite like a 6-foot feline with a red-and-white striped stovepipe hat and a penchant for mischief in the whimsical but off-target family comedy "Dr. Seuss' The Cat in the Hat."

Theodore Geisel — aka Dr. Seuss — strung together 220 rhyming words and created an instant children's classic. Forty-six years later, the same, regrettably, cannot be said of director Bo Welch, whose bloated adaptation is such a visual-

ly assaulting jumble that not even the cat's three-handled, moss-covered family credenza can clean up the on-screen mess.

Two kids, Conrad and Sally (Spenser Breslin and Dakota Fanning), are left home alone on a rainy afternoon with strict orders to behave themselves and keep the house tidy while their mom, Joan (Kelly Preston), is at work.

An added story line about a party Joan is hosting later that evening for her neat-freak boss, Mr. Humberflood (Sean Hayes), ups the ante for making sure that the rooms stay shipshape. Welch also includes a



Universal Studios and DreamWorks/CNS

Dakota Fanning, Mike Myers and Spenser Breslin star in a scene from "Dr. Seuss' The Cat in the Hat" from Universal Studios and DreamWorks.

narcoleptic baby sitter, Mrs. Kwan (Amy Hill), whose presence in the film serves no purpose.

Soon after their mother's departure, the eponymous cat (played in full body fur by Mike Myers) appears with a chapeau full of fun. The cat hangs a snoozing Mrs. Kwan in the coat closet and cajoles the children into breaking their mother's ordinances. The children follow the cat's lead in turning the house upside-down.

The situation gets out of control when the cat opens a magic crate containing Thing 1 and Thing 2 (Danielle Chuchran and Brittany Oakes), a pair of androgynous, havoc-wreaking gremlins. In a concocted plot twist, the box also serves as a gateway to an alternative dimension and begins to transform the house into a surreal Seuss-scape.

Welch has made Joan a single parent and saddled her with a free-loading boyfriend (Alec Baldwin), who feigns nurturing concern for the kids.

As with Ron Howard's "Dr. Seuss's How the Grinch Stole Christmas," the film makes the mistake of trying to stretch a few dozen verses into a feature-length film. And while Howard's movie was unnecessarily content-heavy, Welch's film remains totally content-free, padding its threadbare narrative with protracted special-effects sequences which prove tedious rather than hilarious.

Welch seems to totally forget that people love Dr. Seuss for his magical wordplay, even committing the gravest Seussian sacrilege by having the cat admit he is no good with rhymes. And though the film's ingenious production design faithfully captures the bubblegum color



palette and off-kilter look of Seuss' world, once Geisel's text is jettisoned, what is left is a guy in a cat suit doing a lame stand-up routine — all of which is about as funny as coughing up hairballs.

Mike Myers hogs the spotlight, bombarding viewers with his hyper-frenetic antics and rapid-fire zingers — many retreads from his previous performances — and with a Noo Yawk nasal tone — sounding more like the "Katz in the Hat."

For fans of Dr. Seuss' work, the film's high point comes before the film, during a pre-credit sequence in which the movie studio logos are cleverly animated in the style of the books and Chuck Jones' classic cartoon specials. It's all downhill from there.

Anyone interested in introducing their children to this wonderful tale would be advised to rent the far superior 1971 half-hour TV version. Better yet, read them the book. In fact, a verse found on Page Two reads like a Seussian review of this movie:

"So all we could do was to sit, sit, sit, sit."

"And we did not like it, not one little bit."

Due to cartoon violence, minimal mildly crude language and innuendo, the USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

DiCerto is on the staff of the Office for Film & Broadcasting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

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